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Summary record of the 687th meeting

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 6 October 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Comissário

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

High-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation

Opening of the high-level segment

1. **The Chairperson**, introducing a short film entitled *Afghanistan Calls*, said that Afghanistan remained the largest population under the mandate of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The vast majority had been generously hosted by the Governments in the local communities of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for the past 36 years. He had visited those countries in August and had witnessed first-hand the resilience of the refugee communities. The film shed some light on their situation, the outstanding contributions of the host communities and the opportunities for return to Afghanistan. It would later be made available to interested delegations.

2. *The film entitled* Afghanistan Calls *was projected.*

3. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR had an old and special relationship with Afghanistan, and with the two countries that had taken in 95 per cent of Afghan refugees — the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Reaching over 6 million people at its peak, that was the biggest refugee situation UNHCR had ever dealt with, and the biggest voluntary repatriation operation in its history, with over 5.8 million returnees since 2002. With 2.6 million registered refugees remaining in 70 countries, Afghans were also the world's largest protracted refugee population. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage the international community to refocus on a situation that was no longer receiving the attention it deserved. To ignore Afghanistan would be a dangerous mistake, regardless of the urgency and scale of other, newer crises.

4. The President of Afghanistan and his administration had committed to making durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons a top national priority. That historic commitment, along with the strengthened regional cooperation, offered an important opportunity to make advances in securing durable solutions for Afghan refugees. But such advances would only be possible if the international community provided significantly more support to those efforts than had so far been the case. Most notably, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees to Support Voluntary Repatriation, Sustainable Reintegration and Assistance to Host Countries was the main vehicle for furthering those efforts.

5. Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan remained very challenging, as recent events in Kunduz had shown. The number of internally displaced persons currently stood at nearly 1 million. Afghans continued to leave the country to file new asylum applications elsewhere and, to date, made up nearly 15 per cent of those who have arrived by boat in Europe in 2015. Nevertheless, almost 54,000 refugees had returned to Afghanistan in 2015. They joined the millions of others who had returned home since 2002, to a country where one in every five inhabitants was a former refugee. The Government's comprehensive plan for repatriation and integration was an important step in ensuring better access by returnees to shelter, social services and livelihoods — a key aspect for the sustainability of return.

6. The Afghanistan projects portfolio of the Solutions Strategy set out the priority areas of engagement for which the Office strongly appealed for donor support. The Afghan Government's initiative for an Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package for each returnee family merited particular attention, as it would provide increased support to refugee reintegration in the initial phase following the return home.

7. Turning to the two main countries of asylum, he said that they still hosted 2.5 million registered and an estimated 2 million unregistered Afghans. Their generosity continued to be exemplary. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, all foreign children, irrespective of their legal status, currently had the right to be enrolled in the national education system. Similarly, the Government had decided to include all registered Afghan refugees in the national health insurance scheme on the same basis as its own citizens.

8. Pakistan, for years the world's largest refugee hosting country, had shown equal generosity. It had experienced a number of opportunities and challenges, with 70 per cent of the registered Afghan population under 25 years old, most of them second or even third generation refugees. The Government had reiterated its commitment to the voluntary and phased nature of return to Afghanistan and had generously extended the validity of refugees' proof of registration cards until the end of 2015. A new draft Afghan refugee management and repatriation plan envisaged voluntary repatriation in safety and dignity, the further extension of registration cards until the end of 2017 and temporary stay arrangements for registered Afghan nationals.

9. The current meeting was born out of the recognition that effective and sustainable return to Afghanistan was fundamentally important in the effort to stabilize the entire region. Supporting Afghanistan and the countries hosting its refugees at the current critical point in time was not just a matter of solidarity; it was in the best interest of all.

10. **Mr. Alemi Balkhi** (Afghanistan), Minister for Refugees and Repatriation, said that the President was not able to participate in the proceedings in person because he was attending to events in Kunduz. What was occurring in Afghanistan, and especially in Kunduz, showed how important it was for the international community and donor countries in particular to devote attention to the Afghan refugee situation.

Video message by H.E. Mr. Mohammad Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

11. **Mr. Ghani** (Afghanistan) said that he was grateful to UNHCR for its decades of engagement with Afghanistan and for convening the special meeting on the country's needs and aspirations. He also wished to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan, which for years had opened their borders and offered the Afghan people refuge. He was thankful to the donor community, which had generously contributed to the well-being of refugees. Lastly, he was grateful to the non-governmental organizations that had provided assistance, and commended the many individuals who had demonstrated what a difference goodwill and determination could make.

12. The absence of rules of the game among States and Governments had been a major cause of instability in the region. The lack of agreement on the obligation of States to produce regional stability was costing the country dearly, as the current war imposed on Afghanistan, in particular Kunduz, should remind everyone. Another cause was direct foreign invasion. The Soviet Union, without any justification, had invaded a neutral neighbour and thereby initiated a massive cycle of displacement and misery.

13. There had also been a failure of policy and politics, primarily at the national level. The failure of the Afghan political class in 1992 to agree on rules of governance and the subsequent conflicts that were both internally driven and regionally induced, with international support, had deprived the Afghan people of the opportunity to benefit from the overthrow of the former Soviet Union.

14. There had been a failure internationally to recognize that refugees were a global problem. Nearly 1 million Afghans lived in developed countries. The almost three

generations of Afghans living abroad attracted others. Opportunities for criminal networks had been opened up in a world in which money moved freely but human movement was strictly regulated. They promised people the moon only to abandon them on the seas or in deserts.

15. The question of internally displaced persons and refugees was a top national priority. The Government would focus on factors of exclusion, poverty and corruption. As long as poverty prevailed, refugees would not return voluntarily. With respect to exclusion, the Government had announced a compact with the people which would promote accountability. Corruption took a huge toll on the poor and refugees and internally displaced persons would not feel at home unless they considered that the State made efforts to combat it.

16. Poverty would not be lifted without regional cooperation. Such cooperation could offer in full what foreign aid could only offer in part: the creation of millions of jobs by enabling Afghanistan to act as an Asian hub, with roads to and from all parts of the continent. The emergence of the Asian continental economy in the coming 20 years presented a unique opportunity.

17. Terror was a threat to stability. There could be no distinction between good and bad terrorists. The international community must address the problem together and offer young people the chance to join the mainstream. Lastly, international cooperation was necessary if the problem of instability, exclusion and the systematic generation of refugees and internally displaced persons was to be overcome.

Statements by the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan

18. **Mr. Rahmani Fazli** (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed the hope that the high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation would help alleviate the suffering of Afghan refugees and facilitate their repatriation. The Islamic Republic of Iran hosted a huge number of refugees and was among the leading providers of humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian needs had absorbed significant national resources and the international support provided in that regard had been insufficient. Despite the effects of war and the unjust sanctions imposed on his country, his Government had ensured that refugees living in the Islamic Republic of Iran enjoyed job opportunities and high-quality education and health services.

19. In addition to hosting refugees, his Government also provided support to neighbouring countries in the belief that voluntary repatriation, which had been its focus for the previous 30 years, would provide the best durable solution to the Afghan refugee crisis. He called upon the international community to help create propitious conditions for the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Afghan refugees, inter alia, by taking an active role in the reconstruction of their country.

20. At a meeting held on 19 May 2015 in the Islamic Republic of Iran, his Government, the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as UNHCR and the Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan of the United Nations Secretary-General, had reiterated their commitment to ensuring the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees in safety and dignity. His Government had also developed and implemented a number of voluntary repatriation programmes in 2013 and 2014. Other projects had been developed in cooperation with UNHCR and other United Nations agencies for 2015 and 2016. He expressed the hope that, with financial support, those projects would help move forward the voluntary repatriation process. In conclusion, he wished to reiterate that the refugee problem was of a global nature and required global investment. The international community should take immediate action to fulfil its commitments in that regard in order to ensure the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of refugees.

21. **Mr. Qadir Baloch** (Pakistan) said that, while his Government had made a commitment to repatriate Afghan refugees in dignity and honour by the end of the current year, that deadline was fast approaching but the problem was still there. During 2013 and 2014, only about 30,000 people had returned to Afghanistan. He stressed the urgent need to repatriate the rest of the refugees.

22. The massive influx of Middle Eastern and African refugees into Europe had taken the focus of the international community off the Afghan refugee situation. Yet, that situation had been continuing for over 35 years, during which Afghanistan had faced serious social, political, economic and security challenges. Meanwhile millions of Afghan refugees still remained in Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and other countries. He expressed the hope that the high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation would help bring the forgotten issue back into the spotlight.

23. The voluntary return of Afghan refugees was a precondition for the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan, which in turn was crucial to regional and global stability. He stressed that the international community had a joint responsibility to support Afghanistan in tackling the challenges it faced and urged it and the United Nations to make generous contributions to that end. For its part, Pakistan would make every effort to assist the Afghan Government and people.

24. The fact that some 17 to 20 per cent of the people who were fleeing Afghanistan in the hope of finding jobs and security in Europe were Afghan youths testified to the international community's failure to give enough attention to the problem and to provide the financial assistance required for their integration in Afghanistan. He urged developed States to do more in order to reverse that trend. In particular, the commitment made at the London Conference to provide continued financial support to the Afghan Government until 2017 in order to enable it to carry out its reform programme should be fulfilled. That programme was aimed, inter alia, at ensuring respect for human rights, improving security, strengthening the economy, and promoting good governance and the rule of law. Returning Afghan refugees were expected to play a pivotal role in those developments.

25. Although Pakistan made every effort to help Afghan refugees, including by providing large amounts of wheat and other products, as well as free education and health facilities, the protracted nature of the refugee situation had really tested the tolerance and hospitality of its host communities. His Government had prepared and transmitted to the Afghan Government and other partners a draft plan for the management and repatriation of Afghan refugees, known as the Draft Afghan Refugees Management and Repatriation Plan. The plan provided for the voluntary return of Afghan refugees and contained recommendations for temporary stay arrangements for registered Afghan nationals in Pakistan, a strategy to resolve the Afghan refugee situation, measures for joint resource mobilization and the provision of registration cards.

26. The Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in cooperation with UNHCR, had developed an innovative approach called the Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package. The package, which was Pakistan's top priority, would complement the cash grant of US$ 200 per individual provided by UNHCR to refugees under its voluntary repatriation programme. The package had to be accompanied by comprehensive efforts aimed at creating long-term incentives for the return and reintegration of the refugees, as well as robust development initiatives designed to enhance absorption capacity. He urged everyone present to make a generous contribution in order to help the Government of Afghanistan ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration of its returning nationals.

27. Given the importance of providing assistance to host countries, the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) initiative remained an integral component of the above-mentioned package. The initiative gave priority to such sectors as health, education, water, sanitation, infrastructure development and livelihood opportunities. All planning and development activities under the initiative were carried out on the basis of community needs. Specific projects were presented to potential donors for funding. In conclusion, he said that in order to ensure the return of refugees to Afghanistan and to provide them with education, health and other services, additional assistance of US$ 700 million would be required for the 235,000 returning refugee families. He urged the donor community to consider making that amount available in order to give refugees a realistic chance of reintegration.

28. **Ms. Asifi** (Nansen Refugee Award Laureate) said that wars had a devastating effect on children's education. That was true in the case of Afghanistan, where the war had caused significant damage to the country's education system. Although some improvements had been taking place in that regard, a lot more needed to be done. For example, in Kabul and other large cities, owing to a lack of space in schools, children had to attend school in shifts, with each child being taught only three hours per day, which could not be considered as quality education.

29. Furthermore, many children of Afghan refugees living in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan had limited access to quality education. As a result of poverty, many parents took their children out of school and sent them to perform dangerous jobs. Those children were deprived of their basic rights, including the right to education. Other troubling phenomena included poor families who were forced to place their children in the hands of traffickers and young people who perished at sea while trying to reach developed countries.

30. She herself had been a refugee for over 23 years and had known the pain of displacement and homelessness. No one became a refugee forced to sleep on railway stations on cold nights out of his or her own free will unless it gave them hope of a better future. Investment in quality education for both girls and boys was undoubtedly of crucial importance if the international community wanted underdeveloped countries to prosper. Many women and girls, who made up about 50 per cent of the world's and of Afghanistan's population, were deprived of the right to education. Could a country develop and prosper if half of its population was deprived of access to education? Education was the key to success and the first step towards development and prosperity. She called upon the international community to make education an integral part of their assistance packages.

31. People living in devastated villages and shabby tents carried a lot of potential and talent, much of which was wasted owing to poverty. She stressed that Afghan people, including young people, who made up 70 per cent of Afghanistan's population, were extremely talented and deserved investment. She called upon countries to allocate more funds to education in order to improve the Afghan education system. More schools should be built, teaching material provided and science laboratories built, while more incentives should be offered to teachers, who were currently working on very low salaries. In conclusion, she called on the international community to make every effort to ensure equal access to education for all.

32. **Ms. Richard** (United States of America) said that she offered the condolences of the American people to all those affected by the recent tragic incident at a hospital in Kunduz, into which the United States Department of Defense was launching a full investigation. The United States of America had for many years given priority to offering assistance to Afghan returnees, refugees and displaced persons and funding the provision of the necessary structures and services through UNHCR. It had also resettled nearly 5,000 Afghan refugees and, through the Ministry of Refugees and

Repatriations and the High Commission for Refugee Affairs, supported the Afghan Government in its efforts to facilitate the return of its displaced citizens. Nearly 6 million refugees had returned over the previous decade, but a further 2.5 million were still living outside their country, many for over 30 years now. The Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan were asked to continue offering them a haven until they could return home voluntarily, safely and with dignity. In particular, she requested Pakistan to renew the Proof of Registration cards of 1.5 million Afghan refugees, including that of the previous speaker and winner of the Nansen Refugee Award, which would be expiring at the end of 2015.

33. The United States Government supported the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas programme, under which projects of benefit to both host and refugee communities were implemented, and encouraged the international community to contribute to it. Since 2009, the projects had benefited over 10 million people. Examples included one man who had trained as a welder and had gone on to open his own business, and a woman who had studied dress design and had then opened a successful shop, at the same time offering training to other women in the community. Such cooperation and partnerships, support from the international community and the continued provision by Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran of safe havens for refugees were the only way that Afghanistan could hope to recover from years of conflict. She was particularly honoured to have met Ms. Asifi, whose example was such an inspiration to those working to improve the situation of refugees.

34. **Ms. Günther** (Germany) said that Germany thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan for hosting over 90 per cent of Afghan refugees. It also welcomed the Afghan Government's renewed commitment to put voluntary repatriation and reintegration among its highest national priorities and commended the work of UNHCR in assisting the return of more than 5.8 million Afghan refugees. Although there were many challenges ahead, the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was the way forward. Germany provided financial support to the RAHA programme, to repatriation efforts through UNHCR and to the rehabilitation and reintegration of internally displaced persons in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan. Youth empowerment, education and the creation of livelihood opportunities were vital in achieving durable solutions, one example being the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative, which provided scholarships for refugees wishing to continue their studies in the host country; Afghan students had made up 20 per cent of all such students in 2014.

35. In terms of development, visible improvements had been achieved in terms of life expectancy, maternal mortality rate and access for both boys and girls to education, but the deteriorating security situation in some areas was a great concern and one of the main reasons why many educated young Afghans were leaving their country. They needed to be offered a prospect of stability and a future in Afghanistan. Germany remained committed to continuing to provide financial assistance and to support the defence and security forces, but a political process was essential to any long-term stabilization in the country.

36. **Mr. Bowden** (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) said that the recent expansion of fighting in the north and north-east of Afghanistan, the resurgence of the Taliban, the emergence of ISIS and the spread of fighting into peaceful parts of the country indicated that establishing peace in Afghanistan would need considerable effort and continued support. The current year had seen the highest number of civilian casualties since 2009 and the largest number of persons displaced. Thousands of young Afghans had given up hope and attempted the long and dangerous journey to Europe. To counter that trend, the international community was focusing on the need to find durable and attractive solutions for refugees. Neither 2014 nor 2015 had

offered real opportunities for return, although the fighting had largely remained localized, allowing people to take shelter in other parts of the country. The needs of returnees had to be addressed comprehensively if they were to be enabled to rebuild their lives and secondary displacement was to be avoided. Durable solutions were needed to address the short-term, medium-term and long-term aspects of return and reintegration.

37. The Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees was based on an inter-agency approach, each agency contributing in its area of expertise to form a targeted and integrated response. It offered a framework for projects aimed at helping communities respond to the needs of returnees; refugees who had received training would be in a position to contribute to growth and stability once they returned to Afghanistan. Attention needed to be paid to urban and rural development schemes, and ensuring that returnees had equitable access to them, as well as to basic and social services and gainful employment. The United Nations would, furthermore, continue to support the National Unity Government's efforts to give returnees access to land, livelihoods and services, irrespective of their province or district of origin. It was crucial that the international community continue to extend the support it had offered over the previous 13 years; if it were to abandon Afghanistan now, the implications would be far-reaching and would affect everyone.

38. **Mr. Kamm** (Danish Refugee Council) said that the Danish Refugee Council had gained much experience in its work that could be used to facilitate the successful return of Afghan refugees. He welcomed the statements that had resulted from the Tripartite Commission meetings between Afghanistan, UNHCR and the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan that affirmed the principle of voluntary repatriation, in safety and dignity. The Solutions Strategy and the national steering committees formed a foundation for the returns. Given the socioeconomic realities of the region, it was reassuring that a phased approach would be adopted, as that would give time for conditions to improve. Refugees should also be treated as individuals and their views taken into account. The Danish Refugee Council had responded to their needs and concerns by arranging for people to make preliminary unconditional "go-and-see" visits to their return sites to give them access to the information on which to base their decisions.

39. European countries might well consider the experiences of the countries that were hosting Afghan refugees and learn to consider displaced communities as an asset that could have a positive economic impact at local level. The skills and links the refugees acquired could also be used on their return to their home country. However, they did need to be given economic opportunities, even if only for limited periods. Data were fundamental to the planning process and one area in which they were particularly lacking was clear figures on undocumented persons.

40. Successful return required support towards reintegration, with a legal framework to help returnees acquire identity documents, but also to give recognition of titles and qualifications awarded by other countries, as well as land and property rights. Most returnees went to urban or semi-urban settlements because of the better job opportunities and access to services. That led to increased burdens on growing cities, meaning that urban planning was a critical tool that could enable the authorities to plan for water and energy supplies, traffic, commercial centres and social services for both returnees and existing residents. Livelihood assistance in the form of training, grants and business support was also fundamental, particularly for young people who needed to find and establish their place in the new society to which they were returning.

41. As a complex and dynamic process, return required the involvement of and cooperation between all stakeholders, at national, cross-national and regional levels, in

its different aspects, from the immediate response to long-term structural change. Cross-border coordination, in particular, was critical. Much could be achieved, but only if the displaced communities were made the focus of attention, and it should never be forgotten that peace and stability were preconditions for success.

42. **Ms. Samar** (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission) said that the armed conflict in Afghanistan was the primary reason for the exodus of Afghan refugees, and international cooperation was needed in order to end it. Without such cooperation, the conflict would continue to have direct implications for neighbouring countries and the international community as a whole.

43. Everyone, including refugees and IDPs, had the right to the freedom of movement granted in article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including the right to flee from a dangerous or threatening environment and to seek refuge in a safer place. It was essential for all stakeholders to protect and promote the fundamental rights and freedoms of Afghan refugees by providing a safe and enabling environment for their return. In that connection, there was a need to address such issues as the lack of personal security, the weakness of the rule of law, the presence of warlords and illegal militia and the lack of economic opportunities and public services. There was also a need to address discrimination against returnees, violence against women and children, corruption and failure to respect property rights.

44. She urged the host countries of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan to grant refugee status to the 2 million Afghan asylum seekers in their territories, as a means of ensuring protection for their human rights. She was concerned at reports that those refugees often faced ill-treatment and harassment by the police, lacked access to education and economic opportunities, were not afforded due process rights when charged with an offence and lived in constant fear of deportation. In addition, there was a need to develop joint policies and programmes to protect refugees from the abuses perpetrated against them by human smugglers and traffickers and to punish those found guilty. She exhorted the international community to assist the Afghan Government in providing a safe, enabling environment for returnees by supporting the Solution Strategy for Afghan Refugees, including the provision of assistance to host countries.

45. **The Chairperson** said that, in order to deliver its mandate, UNHCR depended on the dedication of its own staff and its more than 700 partners worldwide. It was therefore with profound sadness that, on behalf of the Executive Committee, he wished to express his solidarity with Médecins Sans Frontières and the families of the medical workers, patients and other civilians who had been killed or injured in the recent tragic events in Kunduz. He proposed that all those present should redouble their commitment to ensuring the protection and safety of all humanitarian personnel throughout the world.

Statements by Member States and Observers

46. **Mr. De Brouwer** (Observer for the European Union), speaking on behalf of the European Union and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republic of Moldova, which associated themselves with his statement, said that the recent hospital bombing in Kunduz provided an opportunity to remind all parties to the conflict in Afghanistan to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure the protection of health-care facilities and humanitarian workers. In 2014, the European Union and its member States had pledged more than €1.25 billion in support for Afghan self-reliance. He welcomed the commitments that the Afghan Government had made as part of the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, which provided an outline for the international community's cooperation with Afghanistan in the next 18 months. It

was only through the fulfilment of those commitments that the programme to provide an Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package for Afghan refugees could be implemented effectively.

47. He wished to commend the outstanding achievements of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in shouldering responsibility for the Afghan refugees in their countries. The European Union recognized that the Pakistani Government was making efforts to address the prevailing protection afforded Afghan refugees in Pakistan, ensure access to services and avoid harassment, extortion and other restrictive measures. The involvement of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and its commitment to promoting a dignified voluntary repatriation process were internationally appreciated.

48. The European Union had been providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable Afghan refugees for more than 20 years. It was becoming necessary to support the sustainable social and economic reintegration of Afghan refugees; to ensure equal support to both documented and undocumented refugees; and to explore avenues for host-country integration where return was not possible. A safe environment and livelihood opportunities were the necessary conditions for the return of Afghan refugees — a financial package alone was insufficient to sustain their reintegration.

49. He encouraged UNHCR to strengthen its protection activities for both documented and undocumented Afghans; to improve its coordination with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); and to facilitate the roll-out of the Refugee Coordination Model and the Joint UNHCR-OCHA Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice. He also urged UNHCR to strengthen its partnerships with development stakeholders and to increase its advocacy of stronger self-reliance and sustainable livelihood opportunities for displaced populations.

50. A complex mix of motivations and push factors governed the flow of young Afghans to Europe, making it difficult to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants. Traditional legal categories that had been adopted in order to define migration status had become increasingly blurred, so that the current outflow from Afghanistan was characterized as one of mixed migration. Tackling the root causes of instability, vulnerability and conflict, and working with Governments and development actors, were among the preconditions for finding solutions to situations of protracted displacement. The European Union was committed to offering its assistance and protection to Afghan refugees and to advocating sustainable solutions for their plight.

51. **Ms. Mondlane** (Mozambique) said that she wished to express her country's solidarity with the people and Government of Afghanistan in their efforts to achieve durable peace and stability and welcomed the establishment of the High Commission for Migration. Mozambique considered the main value of the high-level segment to be its refocus of world attention on the need to take a holistic approach to the protracted refugee situation in Afghanistan that encompassed such issues as protection, assistance, development and the attainment of peace and security. The success of such an approach depended on the international community's engagement in supporting the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees and in bridging the major gaps in the return and reintegration programme in accordance with the Declaration of the 2012 Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan and the Communiqué of the 2014 London Conference on Afghanistan.

52. **Mr. Hattrem** (Norway) said that the Afghan refugee crisis could be resolved only by finding a political solution to the conflict. In the meantime, the way in which stakeholders responded to the challenges facing Afghan refugees could be improved.

The purpose of the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees, which must be based on regional cooperation and international support, was to provide returnees with acceptable living conditions, including a livelihood, housing and social services. It required action in three important areas: first, the international donor community should continue to support the economic development of Afghanistan; second, the international community should continue to support UNHCR in facilitating durable solutions for returning Afghans; and third, the NGO community should be assigned an important role in implementing the Solutions Strategy.

53. Although his delegation welcomed the adoption of the Enhanced Voluntary Return and Reintegration Package, it nevertheless took the view that cash grants were no more than a first step in facilitating sustainable return and reintegration. An increasing number of Afghans were arriving in Europe, which had led to a sharp rise in the number of unaccompanied minors — mostly boys and youths — which Norway considered a cause for concern. A concerted effort by countries of origin and host countries was needed in order to address that problem. Norway was committed to ensuring that all asylum seekers, including children, had their cases reviewed individually and that their due process rights were respected. Those in need of protection would be granted asylum, but other migrants would be returned to Afghanistan, in keeping with both the international obligations of Norway and its bilateral agreement with Afghanistan.

54. Although individual States, the United Nations system and various NGOs had a role to play in supporting the voluntary return of Afghan refugees to Afghanistan, the chief responsibility for facilitating sustainable repatriation and reintegration belonged to the Afghan Government. The keys to successful return and integration were the availability of housing, job opportunities and the choice of where to settle, but the solution to the Afghan refugee crisis was a prosperous and safe Afghanistan.

55. **Ms. Kalkku** (Finland) said that Afghan refugees represented a great untapped human, economic and social capital that was urgently needed by Afghanistan for its development. At the same time, the refugees were potential contributors to their host-country communities. Finland welcomed the approach to empowering youths taken by the Governments of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan in the Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees. In addition to stability, an inclusive and just society was needed in which the rights and participation of all members of the population were respected on an equal basis. Finland welcomed the vision and commitments of the Afghan Government, as set out in the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, and strongly encouraged their implementation, since much hard work remained to be done to fight poverty and corruption, promote human rights, improve governance and strengthen the rule of law.

56. Finland continued to do its share to support the stabilization and development efforts of Afghanistan through crisis management, humanitarian assistance, development aid and foreign trade. Along with asylum seekers, Finland received Afghan refugees as part of an annual resettlement quota, giving preference to the most vulnerable among them. Finland supported the Istanbul Ministerial Process and stressed the need for robust regional cooperation in order to find durable solutions. What ultimately counted were the efforts of the Afghan Government and its ability to pursue reform. The role of the international community was to remain steadfast in that process and support the affected communities. Finland stood ready to continue that important work.

57. **Mr. Meriguet Martínez** (Ecuador) said that the Afghan refugee and IDP crisis, like other similar crises, was the result of political instability wrought by the interference of foreign powers in the sovereign affairs of the Afghan people. That crisis also bore the traces of colonialism, struggles for geopolitical and religious

influence and the imposition of state and government models that were ill-adapted to the social, historical and cultural realities of Afghanistan. The failure of the most recent military intervention in Afghanistan by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was a case in point. After 15 years of operations and at enormous human and financial cost, it had not managed to stabilize the country, end the armed conflict or lay the foundations for development.

58. Ecuador was critical of such international military intervention because it had not been successful in meeting its purported objectives, whether the promotion of democracy, the eradication of weapons of mass destruction or the protection of human rights. The military interventions in Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen had all caused more suffering and destruction than they had eliminated. His Government believed in political dialogue and in peaceful and negotiated solutions to conflicts with the international community's participation in an advisory capacity.

59. Despite progress made in the voluntary return of the millions of Afghan refugees since 2002, his Government had doubts about the sustainability of such reintegration, owing to the political and sectarian violence that continued to affect many parts of the country and the economic degradation caused by the protracted armed conflict. Political stability in Afghanistan could be achieved through dialogue and reconciliation among the various ethnic and religious groups and the Afghan people's exercise of their right to self-determination by means of a government made up of the legitimate representatives of all sectors of Afghan society, including the 2.6 million refugees living abroad who were waiting for improved security in order to return home.

60. **Mr. Alemi Balkhi** (Afghanistan) said that he was grateful for the organization of the high-level segment on the Afghan refugee situation and wished to thank all participants for their expressions of support. He hoped that the outcome of the present meeting would elicit pledges for continuing support for Afghan refugees and returnees.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.